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Joseph Henry Longford (1849–1925), Consul and Scholar

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INTRODUCTION

JOSEPH HENRY LONGFORD was born on 25 June 1849, the son of Charles Longford of Blackrock, County Dublin. He was educated in Belfast and earned a degree at Queen's University, of which he became a D. Litt. many years later. He was appointed a student interpreter in the Japan consular service on 24 February 1869, after passing the examination and served there for thirty-three years in several important consular posts.

In many respects, Longford is one of the forgotten scholars of the Japan service, eclipsed by better-known men such as Sir Ernest Mason Satow (1843–1929), William George Aston (1841–1911), John Harrington Gubbins (1852–1929) and Sir George Sansom (1883–1965). Yet while Longford was certainly not the most dazzling star in the narrow but bright firmament of 'old Japan hands', he was a talented and capable man, qualified as a barrister, who after retiring from the consular service at the age of fifty-three had a significant second career as a Professor of Japanese at King's College London from 1902 to 1916 and thereafter as Professor Emeritus of the University of London.

Longford produced a number of informative and readable books about Japan during this period. He also was deeply involved in retirement with the Japan Society, something which Satow steadfastly chose to avoid in his retirement years, preferring the relative seclusion of Ottery St. Mary in Devon over the bustle of the capital.

LONGFORD IN THE JAPAN CONSULAR SERVICE (1869–1902)

The Foreign Office List of 1921 records that Longford ‘passed a competitive examination’ and ‘obtained an honorary certificate’ on entry to the service as Student Interpreter in 1869. He started out at Tokyo, but was soon ‘Acting 3rd Assistant’ at Kanagawa (Yokohama) in 1871, gaining promotion to second class assistant on 1 June 1872. From there he seems to have gone briefly to Nagasaki before returning to Kanagawa in 1874. He alternated between there and Tokyo until attaining promotion to 1st Class Assistant at the latter on 1 April 1882. Further promotion made him provisional Vice-Consul on 9 September 1884 and he was confirmed in that post on 20 May 1886. He appears then to have taken a long leave in England which allowed him to study law. He was admitted to the Society of the Middle Temple on 5 April 1878 at the age of 28. He was called to the bar at the Middle Temple in absentia on 15 May 1889.¹ (This was something which Ernest Satow had achieved with distinction a few years previously, while complaining that the Foreign Office did not show much interest or offer any support for this effort.)

On Longford’s return to Japan he was evidently trusted to move further afield than the Tokyo–Yokohama area, serving first as Acting Consul at ‘Hiogo’ in 1889 and 1890 (note the quaint persistence in refusing to call the post Kobe, despite that port opening in 1868!), then at Hakodate from November 1890 to April 1892. Thereafter he apparently returned to Tokyo as Vice-Consul, though the F.O. List is silent on this point. He wrote to Satow, then British Minister to Japan and accordingly his superior, from Hakone on 9 August 1895:

We have had a fairly fine week, though last night we got utterly lost for a couple of hours on the lake in a thick fog . . . Our friend the Rev. J. Francis – the rector of the Church in Tsukiji [foreign settlement, Tokyo] . . . intends to call on you . . . I am sure you will like him. He is both a nice fellow and an accomplished scholar.²

Before alluding to preparing the trade returns which seem to have been one of his favourite topics and (self-justifying) occupations, he continues with – surely unintended – irony about the need to follow

the German example of sending a consul to Formosa after Japan’s gain of that territory in the Sino–Japanese War. This was in fact Longford’s next posting as a full Consul at Tainan on 4 February 1896. Perhaps his most memorable letter preserved in the Satow papers was a confidential one written to Satow, again from Hakone, on 14 September 1895 in which he enclosed a protest from the Yokohama branch of the China Association about the Anglo–Japanese Treaty abolishing extraterritoriality five years later, signed on 16 July 1894 together with a memorandum written by himself. In the latter he dissects the Treaty carefully, and concludes:

The whole Treaty contains scarcely one redeeming clause. Its supposed advantages are believed to be thoroughly illusory by the oldest and most liberal minded foreign residents in Japan, and even from the missionaries . . . it has hardly obtained one word of approval. On the other hand, the injury that it may cause to trade, navigation and residence are considered to be both apparent and real.³

Needless to say the complaints were ignored, and the net result of such moaning after the event can only have been to damage Longford’s reputation in Satow’s eyes, and perhaps also at the Foreign Office.

Unfortunately worse was to come: it is clear that Taiwan was not an agreeable posting for Longford, and he made his feelings plain in increasingly lengthy epistles to Satow, who carefully filed them for posterity with his other letters.

A typical example is the following dated 20 April 1896:

. . . I have found a good carpenter, but otherwise the place does not improve on further acquaintance and my earnest desire will always be to get out of it on any terms at the earliest possible date. I find the heat terribly trying, the want of water, ice, decent food are hard to a man accustomed to abundance of all three, expenses are very high owing to the demand for everything by the Japanese, and the loneliness will be terrible. The condition of the house is shocking, and I do trust you will say something to [R.J.] Marshall [Office of Works, Shanghai] about it. The rains might come on any day now with the change of the monsoon . . . For a man who could live on splendid sunsets, the place would be very attractive, but there can not be much attraction in it for those of less aesthetic tastes.⁴

On 13 July 1896, Longford wrote to Satow from Anping that he ‘should infinitely prefer Nagasaki, with even £800 a year, to either Tamsui or Tainan with £900, and equally infinitely, Tamsui to Tainan’. He added that he thought the Taiwan posts should be filled

by younger men. By 28 July, he was writing that the Consulate's medical officer, Dr Wykeham Myers, had advised him to leave. Eventually Myers wrote to Satow on 18 October that 'Mr Longford has for some time been suffering from increasing mental depression' and that he was also afflicted with 'a lowering attack of boils over the greater part of his body'. Myers recommended six weeks minimum leave. Satow, showing a degree of sympathy which might surprise some of his harsher critics, answered Myers on 3 November:

The mental depression you speak of I can well understand in the case of a man of warm family affections separated for the first time from his wife and children. I am telegraphing to him today to the effect that he will be relieved by his successor about the 20 December.

Longford had a wife (Alice) and young family and clearly missed them. He left Taiwan for Amoy on mainland China in November. His observations of the lawlessness and disorder (including some massacres by Japanese troops) in Japan's first ever colony had been of value, despite his mental state. Officially he was transferred in accordance with his wishes to Nagasaki on 28 December 1896 and a fresh commission was issued to him on 28 July of the following year.

On 2 January 1897, Longford wrote from Tsukiji that he had 'not at all regained strength as I hoped', expressing anxiety and enclosing some notes about the Nagasaki consulate. The main points were the increase in shipping work and the large number of warships which 'gives risk of disturbances on shore'. Longford noted that 'naval courts have been more numerous at Nagasaki than any other port' and that there was a burdensome custom of consuls calling on 'all men of war' (warships). He added: 'This service requires a great deal of time, and if dropped might occasion offence.'⁵ On arrival in Nagasaki, Longford complained again, opening his first letter of 1 February 1897 with: 'It is hopeless, or almost so, to get any temporary clerical assistance in the Consulate here.' Thomas Glover went to Satow on 13 February to appeal on Longford's behalf for a clerk but Satow was unmoved.⁶ On 26 April 1897, Longford sent a 'rough memo' of his day's work. Eventually he did get a clerk.

On 29 July 1898, Longford wrote to Satow to complain of a decrease in pay. Satow was not sympathetic this time as no salary reduction was contemplated, and he told Longford:

The duties of a consul are I take it in the first place to render what services he can to his countrymen . . . to smooth over difficulties between shipmasters and their crews, to cultivate friendly relations with the local authorities and to keep the Minister informed . . .

This elicited another long and relentlessly analytical response on 13 August from the aggrieved Longford who took each of the four points in turn and stated how he believed he had complied with them.

Again, on 18 April 1899, Longford wrote to complain of an insulting offer for his work as Austrian chargé d'affaires:

Forty pounds a year is a good deal of money to me personally . . . but it becomes little short of offensive when given to H.M. Consul as a recompense for 18 years representation of Austrian interests, and two years very considerable work.

Satow's answer on 22 April recommended Longford to accept the money. Nevertheless, on 30 June, Satow wrote to F. Villiers at the Foreign Office on behalf of Kobe consul J.C. Hall and Longford:

Hall has been here since he last came out over 8 and a half years, Longford over 10. The former has 6 children, the latter 4. Consequently, having no private means at all, and quite unable to put by a penny, they cannot go home on leave. I think it is bad for men to be here for such long periods. Their health deteriorates and their minds get narrow . . . They are both poor men.

Satow passed on a request from the two long-serving Consuls to recommend personal allowances of £100 a year each, but this was turned down.⁷

Despite his allegedly limited means, it is interesting to note that in later years Longford apparently lived comfortably enough in Chiswick and was a member of the Reform and the Royal Irish Yacht Clubs. A sociable man, his modest interests were boating, walking, watching cricket and playing bridge.⁸

LONGFORD AT KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON (1902–16) AND THEREAFTER

In August 1902, Longford was 'in attendance on H.I.H. Prince Akihito, of Japan, at the Coronation of King Edward VII'.⁹ For this service, he was awarded the Coronation Medal and retired from the Japan Consular Service on a pension on 15 August 1902. He was 'appointed almost immediately to the chair of Japanese at King's College, London'.¹⁰ There should have been a considerable demand for a man with Longford's experience of Japan following the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on 30 January 1902 when, as the *Times* wrote, 'public interest in our new ally was naturally keen'. Longford had accumulated a great amount of information on Japanese history,

culture and customs, and he proceeded to lay it before the public in a variety of publications.

As early as 1877, Longford had written a legal work entitled *The Penal Code of Japan*,¹¹ but his first published work at his academic post was entitled simply *Japan* in a series called *Living Races of Mankind*. This was followed by an important contribution to *The Cambridge Modern History* entitled 'The Regeneration of Japan' (1910).

Thereafter, in short order, the following books appeared under Longford's name: *The Story of Old Japan* (1910); *The Story of Korea* (1911); *Japan of the Japanese* (1911); *The Evolution of New Japan* (1913); *Japan* (Spirit of the Allied Nations series, 1915); *Japan* (Harmsworth Encyclopedia, 1920); *Japan* (Nations of Today, 1923). In addition he contributed to the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* and *The Proceedings and Transactions of the Japan Society* and wrote frequently to *The Times*, not only about Japanese matters but also about Irish politics and other topics.

In the preface to *Japan of the Japanese*, Longford begins: 'Books on Japan are as plentiful as primroses in April, but the majority are equally evanescent . . .' He nevertheless claims, with good reason, to have been 'painstaking' in his study of the Japanese people over the greater part of his life and so justifies his own publication. The second edition was published in 1915 after the death of Emperor Meiji. Of General Nogi's *junshi*¹² (loyally following a master in death) he says it is a samurai custom which has survived despite repeated legal prohibition. He continues:

In Japan neither suicide nor assassination can, even at the present day, be judged by the ethical codes of Christian Europe . . . Both [Nogi and his wife] are now no less remembered as the devoted servants whose souls attended that of their beloved master [Meiji] to the land of spirits, than is the husband as the brave and capable captor of Port Arthur and the wife as the mother who gave her only sons to die in that Master's cause.

In 1919, Longford was interviewed by the then Australian Prime Minister W.M. Hughes about a possible appointment as Professor of Japanese Studies in Australia, but by then he was too old and the proposal was not pursued.¹³

Longford's *Japan* (Nations of Today, 1923) was part of *A New History of the World*, a series edited by the great novelist John Buchan. It was described in the *Times* obituary as one of his best books. Longford dedicated it to his wife 'who lived seventeen years and my daughters who were born and passed their childhood in Japan, none of whom can recall one unhappy day that was due to either the country or its

people'. In the preface he mentions the various histories of Japan by Brinkley, Murdoch, Griffis, Murray, Kaempfer, Satow, Aston and Chamberlain. He indicates that all contain 'ample information . . . but some of them are no longer available . . . and most demand a degree of attentive or even analytical reading . . .' In contrast, Longford says he 'has already provided, in three distinct works, popular histories of both Old and New Japan and of Japan's relations with Korea . . .' This fourth work is 'written in a similar style', and aims at 'giving a succinct narrative of the epochs of Japanese history and concise descriptions of their most striking events and most remarkable personages'. He describes Japan as 'a rising commercial and industrial Power' albeit far behind Britain in this regard. Still, 'Great Britain may contemplate Japan as a commercial rival (in all corners of the globe) that cannot be indifferently regarded in the present day and who, in a future that is not very remote, may be found a competitor that will test her industry, ingenuity and enterprise to the very utmost.' On the other hand, Japan is 'in the very front rank of the great military Powers' and (rather ominously) 'saturated with the spirit of militarism'. No doubt Longford had the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) in mind, but he was again eerily prophetic:

Great Britain now holds her Far Eastern colonies, the great commercial depots of Hong Kong and Singapore, entirely on the sufferance of Japan. From either she could be ousted as speedily as were the Germans from Kiaochow [in 1914].

Writing in April 1923, soon after the ending of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1922, to which he devoted Chapter XIX, he continued:

. . . while Japan is to-day our firm and trusted friend . . . [i]t behoves Great Britain to retain her goodwill and to that end to neglect no means of acquiring a knowledge of Japan . . . no less exact and extensive than that which Japan has already acquired of Great Britain and is now daily using to the fullest extent.

In 1925, Longford, described as an Emeritus Professor of King's College and Vice-President of the Japan Society, revised and edited the immense three-volume history of Japan by the late James Murdoch (1856–1921), and he was presumably the author of the entertaining introduction of the Scottish radical scholar and historian whose feats of memory as a child were astonishing, and who taught at Nakatsu Middle School (Kyushu) and at Kagoshima. Longford praised his teaching methods which encouraged independent thinking, and indeed Natsume Sōseki also remembered Murdoch as his teacher at

Tokyo University with affection. Longford himself died before the work was published in 1926, though he added many footnotes.

CONCLUSION

If J.H. Longford's Japan-oriented scholarship was not cutting-edge or pioneering Japanology, his compendious written work had the great merit of readability. It is less demanding of readers in vocabulary and syntax than that of, for example, J.H. Gubbins or G.B. Sansom, and he performed a very useful service in editing and tidying up, so to speak, after the likes of the adviser to the Japanese Minister of Education David Murray (author of *Japan* which was first published in 1894) and James Murdoch. It is clear that he had twin passions both for writing (first cultivated in the consular service) and for Japan and its people. Imbued with a sense of mission, he laboured long and hard to introduce an exotic country on the other side of the world to a British audience in an era when visits to Japan were still mainly the preserve of wealthy globetrotters and seamen.

Longford's breadth of vision and foresight are shown in the following quotation:

Friendship with the United States is the cardinal element in Great Britain's foreign policy. Friendship with Japan, firm, fast, continuing, is little less necessary to her for the preservation of her Eastern Empire and her Far Eastern trade, and if it is not maintained Japan may . . . accept from a restored Germany what she has sought in vain from Great Britain . . .¹⁴

Longford clearly saw that international diplomacy is a zero-sum game, where one country's loss is often another's gain, and rightly feared the consequences of a decline in Anglo-Japanese relations. It seems appropriate that he should have his reputation restored in the present day when his views have increasing relevance.